Education & Skills
Funding Agency

School Place Planning Tables 2017:
technical guidance

1. About this document

This document sets out:

a) the methodology used in estimating future school places needed;
b) the data sources and how they are used;
c) how to interpret the published outputs (including key limitations).

2. Background

Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that they provide sufficient school places. Decisions on how to achieve this are taken at local level, based on forecast pupil numbers across the planning areas (PAs) in a local authority. These PAs are groups of schools, often (but not exclusively) in a similar geographic area, reflecting patterns of provision. The PAs for primary are different to the PAs for secondary.

Each year, local authorities submit data via the School Capacity Survey (SCAP) to the Department setting out their pupil forecasts, the existing school capacity in all maintained mainstream schools in their area, and information about planned projects to deliver new additional places.

The information from local authorities is combined with information on projects that are centrally funded by the Department to arrive at estimates of future place provision. The Department compares these with the local authority pupil forecasts to arrive at estimates of future place demand. The estimates are calculated on two different bases, the first giving an assessment of places needed only, and the second showing where there are spare places as well.

2. Overview of Method

A simple approach to determining places still needed would be to compare the projected demand for places with existing capacity. The level of aggregation at which the source data are provided is by NCYG (National Curriculum Year Group) by PA. So for each NCYG within each PA the simple places needed can be calculated as:

$$simple\ places\ needed = forecast\ demand - existing\ capacity$$

Where demand is greater than capacity a need for places results (shown as a positive figure); where capacity is greater than demand a spare capacity results (shown as a negative figure).

A more sophisticated approach takes into account confirmed future additions to capacity:

$$places\ needed = forecast\ demand - (existing\ capacity + additional\ capacity)$$

Additional capacity is that planned to be added by local authorities and that planned to be added through projects funded centrally by the Department. Only places that are confirmed as having a high degree of certainty of going ahead are included. For more information on future additional capacity, see section 3.

There are two approaches to estimating future places needed:

a) where any spare places beyond the specific NCYG and PA are set aside

This allows for examination of school place pressure under the strict criteria of places being provided in a specific NCYG and specific PA.

b) where spare places in other NCYGs or PAs are allowed to offset demand.

This allows for examination of school place pressure bearing in mind the availability of places in other NCYGs or PAs.

A worked example showing the difference is given in section 4.

3. Data sources

There are two main data sources used: School Capacity (SCAP) data and Central Programmes data.

SCAP Data

The SCAP data include pupil forecasts, school capacities and future additional places (referred to as the capital spend data). Guidance provided to local authorities for the completion of this data collection can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/school-capacity-survey-2017-guidance.

The data has undergone a significant programme of cleaning after receipt to determine that it has been completed according to the guidance.

The SCAP (capital spend data) collects data on local authority projects[1] with firm plans to deliver places. We expect this to involve council approval to proceed or planning permission in place. Each project identifies a school, the planning area where the places will be added, the academic year those places will be added, and number of additional mainstream places involved. Where a project provides additional mainstream places from 2017/18, the capacity they introduce is incorporated into the approach. There is one adjustment to note. Where a project is identified as a bulge class[2], the additional places are progressed through the cohort, so a reception class in 2017/18 becomes a Y1 class in 2018/19, and so on.

[1] Includes Targetted Basic Need (TBN) projects

[2] An increase in capacity to cope with a spike in demand that is not necessarily sustained in subsequent pupil cohorts.

The collective addition to capacity of all projects within a PA is identifed in the underlying data as “LA additional places”.

Central Programme Data

The approach accounts for changes in capacity provided through:

a) Free Schools

This is based on the expected number of open year groups in each academic year for free schools that are:

- already open and included in the 2017 SCAP data;
- those Free Schools that opened in 2017;
- those due to open by September 2018 with agreed terms in place.

More information on Free Schools can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/free-schools-open-schools-and-successful-applications.

b) Condition Improvement Fund (CIF)

This reflects changes in capacity after May 2017 that happen as part of CIF projects, attributing it to the academic year immediately after the project completes, and splitting it equally across NCYGs. More information on CIF projects can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/condition-improvement-fund.

c) Priority Schools Building Programme 1

This reflects changes in capacity after May 2017 as a result of these projects (both increases and decreases), attributing it to the future academic year according to the completion schedule for the project. More information on PSBP 1 can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/priority-school-building-programme-psbp.

d) Academy (and Free School) closures

This reflects changes in capacity as a result of an academy or Free School closing after 1 May 2017 which therefore no longer provides the capacity reported in the School Capacity data. Their capacity has therefore been excluded.

All the information acquired to make the above adjustments in respect of centrally funded programmes has undergone a data quality assessment, and is correct as at February 2018. The net effect of all 4 strands is reflected in a single figure in the underlying data, identified as “central programme places”.

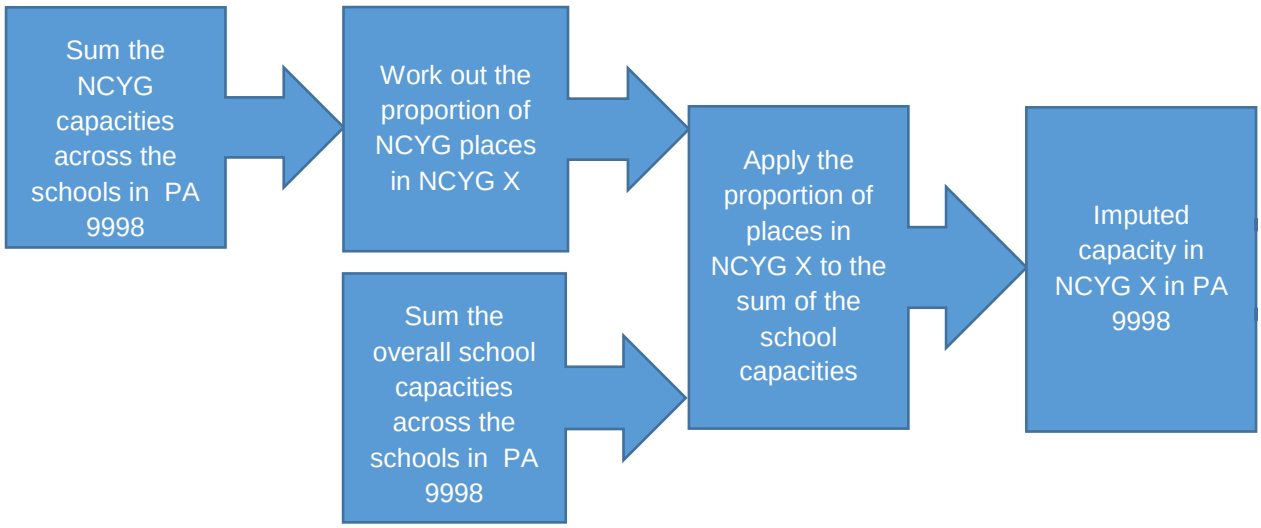
4. Methodology

Apportioning the existing SCAP capacity

The existing primary and secondary capacity reported through SCAP is distributed between year groups according to the following calculations. It is important to understand that the SCAP collection asks for an overall capacity (based on a physical assessment of the building for local authority maintained schools, or the overall capacity set out in Funding Agreements for academies) as well as individual NCYG capacities related to the Published Admission Numbers (PANs). The NCYG capacities do not necessarily add up to the overall capacity, for example, where a school has a sixth form or where a school chooses to admit pupils at a different level to that which the physical space suggests.

Primary: Imputing the available capacity in PA 9998 for NCYG X

Figure 1: Diagram showing the steps involved in calculating the primary capacity in a year group using PA 9998 as an example.



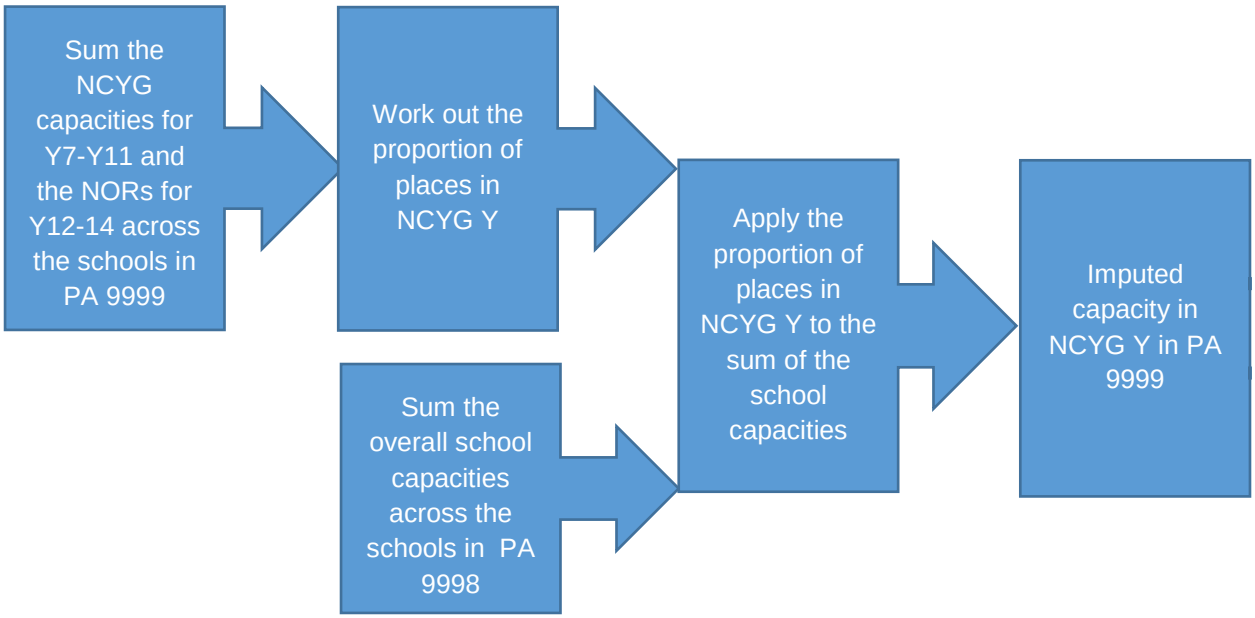
The same calculation is repeated for each NCYG, from reception through to Y6, and for each PA.

Secondary: Imputing the available capacity in PA 9999 for NCYG Y

A very similar process is applied, but adjusted to account for the overall school capacity including sixth form accommodation whilst no separate capacities are

collected for sixth form year groups (NCYG 12+). For NCYG 12+, the numbers of pupils on roll (NOR) are used as a proxy for capacity.

Figure 2: Diagram showing the steps involved in calculating the secondary capacity in a year group using PA 9999 as an example.



The same calculation is repeated for each NCYG, from Y7 through to Y11, and for each PA.

Adding in the additional future places

The data for additional future places created through local authority projects is collected by academic year of delivery, and by NCYG. After the adjustment for bulge classes, they can be simply summed to PA level. No further adjustments are necessary.

The data for additional future places created by centrally funded programmes is either collected by academic year of delivery, and by NCYG, or can be imputed as such during collection and validation (see section 3.2). No further adjustments are necessary.

The additional future places are combined with the existing capacity at PA and NCYG level to give a combined profile of capacity for the forecast years.

Comparing with forecasts

We now have both the capacity and forecasts in the same structure. The following tables use illustrative data to show how the calculation works. The same calculations would be repeated for all forecast academic years and all PAs.

Capacity	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
PA 9998	400	400	400	300	300	300	300	2400
PA 9999	170	150	120	200	200	200	200	1240
Total	570	550	520	500	500	500	500	3640

Forecasts	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
PA 9998	410	390	400	290	270	280	280	2320
PA 9999	190	160	130	200	180	180	170	1210
Total	600	550	530	490	450	460	450	3530

A subtraction of capacity from forecasts results in the places needed (a positive figure is a pressure; a negative figure represents spare places):

Places needed	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
PA 9998	10	-10	0	-10	-30	-20	-20	-80
PA 9999	20	10	10	0	-20	-20	-30	-30
Total	30	0	10	-10	-50	-40	-50	-110

The published outputs display two versions of the model. In version (1) any spare places are zeroed before summation.

Places needed	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
PA 9998	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
PA 9999	20	10	10	0	0	0	0	40
Total	30	10	10	0	0	0	0	50

In version (2), the spare places are retained, and factored into the totals – so keeping the original results.

Places needed	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
PA 9998	10	-10	0	-10	-30	-20	-20	-80
PA 9999	20	10	10	0	-20	-20	-30	-30
Total	30	0	10	-10	-50	-40	-50	-110

Specific limitations of the modelling

Users of these outputs should note the following specific limitations:

1. Using NOR as a proxy for capacity in sixth form year groups can understate capacity in the sixth form, which then pushes more capacity onto Y7-Y11, which in turn can lead to understating of residual pressure in those NCYGs.

2. Many local authorities model their future demand based on the Published Admission Numbers (PANs) for the school. Where the overall school capacity differs from the sum of the NCYG capacities, this will result in a different imputed NCYG capacity to PAN, and consequently different views on the level of available capacity.

3. Forecast pupil number data goes to 2021/22 for primary and 2023/24 for secondary. Currently, most forecasts continue to increase into the future. Planned capacity data is generally reported more strongly in the immediate future, since we only include places for which there are firm plans, with relatively little reported beyond 2-3 years out. The places needed will therefore naturally grow with time (or equivalently, the level of spare places will reduce).

4. The data provide a snapshot in time at 1 May 2017 – local authorities will be approving new projects to add more places during the year, and reviewing their forecasts in response to new population data.

Interpretation of the model outputs

Users of these outputs should be mindful that these are estimates. Local practice will differ from the constraints set in the model. It is common for local authorities to reasonably and successfully allocate school places outside the PA where the travel distances remain acceptable, or, particularly in rural areas, for schools to operate with mixed year group teaching. Version (1) of the model suggests that, at May 2017, around 33,000 primary places and 14,000 secondary places were still needed for September 2017 (tables B1 & B2). As well as offers in a different PA or in a mixed year group, there will be places in newly created accommodation added after 1 May 2017 to address this need. The estimated places needed figures in the

published tables should be taken as indicative of the relative future place pressures faced by local authorities.

Version (1) of the model (tables B1-B4), showing places needed only and setting aside pockets of spare capacity, is the principal model. This acknowledges that pressure in one part of a local authority (or NCYG) cannot necessarily be offset by spare places in another area (or NCYG). This was the presumption behind the introduction of PAs, replacing the use of larger district areas that were masking the true picture. However, it is useful to know the extent of any spare capacity in neighbouring PAs (or NCYGs) when making an overall assessment of the places required in an area – hence the inclusion of version (2).

Version (2) of the model (tables B5 & B6), showing the level of spare capacity as well as places needed, has most validity at PA level where the supply of places is matched to the appropriate local demand. Aggregating across PAs to LA level can give the impression of significant levels of spare places. Whilst in some LAs the prospect of dispersal of pupils across PAs is reasonable, in others it would be improbable. Aggregation to LA level is included to demonstrate the overall position at that geography and to guide the reader through the table, rather than being an expected approach to place planning.

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